

RECON examined an approximately 2,150-ft-wide (655-m-wide) corridor that included the 120-ft (37-m) easement for the existing IV-La Rosita line and 1,000 ft (305 m) on either side of this line. BLM has designated the projects area an ACEC, partially because of the high density of cultural resources found in the region (BLM 1999).

The surveys identified 26 prehistoric sites and 1 historic site. Nine of these sites had been identified prior to the 2001 survey. The majority of these sites are associated with the late prehistoric period. The projects area is located on a portion of the shoreline of Lake Cahuilla. This is the primary reason for the large concentration of sites in such a relatively small area. Most of the sites represent locations where prehistoric peoples were camping along the edge of the lake. Of the 26 prehistoric sites, 23 are recommended as eligible for the NRHP (Berryman and Cheever 2001b). Sites found in the projects area include residential bases, field camps, lithic scatters, ceramic scatters, lithic and ceramic scatters, isolate ceramics, and isolate lithics. A single historic scatter dating to the 1930s was also identified in the projects area but was not eligible for NRHP listing.

3.6 LAND USE

The proposed transmission line routes are located in Imperial County, California (Figure 3.6-1). The land needed for these projects is owned by the Federal government and managed by BLM. The two 120-ft (37-m) wide and 6-mi (10-km) long ROWs would be located within BLM's Utility Corridor N in the Yuha Basin portion of the Colorado Desert. The proposed transmission lines would run from the U.S.-Mexico border to the IV Substation.

3.6.1 Imperial County

Imperial County encompasses 4,597 mi² (11,906 km²). It is bordered on the west by San Diego County, on the north by Riverside County, on the east by Arizona, and on the south by Mexico. Roughly 50% of the county is undeveloped. The primary economic activity in the county is agriculture, with nearly 3 million acres (1 million ha) under irrigation. Water for irrigation is drawn from the Colorado River. The Salton Sea, a 381-mi² (987-km²) lake, is located in the northern portion of the county. The New and Alamo Rivers are found in the southern part of the county as well as the All American Canal.

3.6.2 Federal Land

In 1976, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Section 601, established the CDCA in southeast California. Roughly 12 million acres (5 million ha) of the 25 million-acre (10 million-ha) CDCA are public lands managed by BLM. Management practices for this area are defined in the CDCA Final Environmental Impact Statement and Plan issued in 1980 and amended in 1999 (BLM 1999). The current projects area is located on a portion of the public land discussed in this plan.

Management practices on public land are defined as multiple use, sustained yield (BLM 1999). This approach attempts to balance the needs and desires of the public with the natural and cultural resources found on the land. Management of the land should allow the public to enjoy the resources in a way that will ensure the survival of the resources for the benefit of future generations.

The BLM Plan designated 40,069 acres (16,215 ha) of the CDCA known as the Yuha Basin as an ACEC because of the dense concentrations of archaeological sites in this region and because it is the habitat of the flat-tailed horned lizard, a BLM sensitive species. A plan outlining the management practices for the Yuha Basin ACEC was developed in 1981 (BLM 1981). In addition, the boundary for the Yuha Basin ACEC was extended to the U.S.-Mexico border in 1985. This designation as an ACEC provides special land use and management requirements intended to enhance and protect the sensitive cultural and biological resources found in the region. The projects area for the proposed transmission lines is located in the Yuha Basin ACEC.

Management practices within the Yuha Basin ACEC include controlled and signed vehicle access, increased field presence, and intensive resource inventories (BLM 1999). The entire Yuha Basin ACEC is designated a Class L (limited) multiple use area in the CDCA Plan. In a limited multiple use area, only low-intensity controlled activities are allowed.

3.6.3 Recreation

The Western Colorado Desert Routes and Travel Designation Plan identifies the recreational activities that are allowed in the Yuha Basin ACEC (BLM 2002). This largely restricts the recreational use of the Yuha Basin ACEC. Travel is allowed on BLM-designated routes only. Routes designated “Limited Use” south of Interstate 8 are restricted to street legal vehicles only. All vehicles are allowed on routes designated “Open.” Parking is permitted adjacent to routes south of Interstate 8 only during daylight hours, except unoccupied vehicles next to the Jacumba Wilderness left by overnight wilderness visitors. Camping is only permitted in designated areas within the Yuha ACEC.

3.6.4 Economic Development

No active sand or gravel mine sites are in the projects area. However, two inactive gravel quarries are within the projects area south of State Route 98. The closest active mining site is 2.5 mi (4 km) west of the projects area (Marty 2003).

As part of the CDCA Plan, several utility corridors were identified. These areas were chosen to guide future development of the nation’s energy system. One of the corridors, Utility Corridor N, is located on the eastern edge of the Yuha Basin CDCA. The IV Substation is located in this corridor. The projects area would be located in Utility Corridor N.

3.6.5 U.S. Customs and Border Patrol

The area where the proposed transmission lines would cross the U.S.-Mexico border is patrolled by the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Activities undertaken in this area by the Border Patrol include surveillance through manned inspection and recently installed cameras for monitoring any activity along the border. Barriers have been erected on roads that cross the border to restrict motorized access across the border. A restriction on development along the border is identified in a 1907 Presidential Proclamation that requires that no construction be allowed along the border that could inhibit the protection or monitoring of the border.

3.6.6 Wilderness

The CDCA also designates Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Roughly 2,094,000 acres (850,000 ha) of the CDCA are recommended for WSAs. The nearest WSA to the project area is 15 mi (24 km) to the west, well outside the proposed and the two alternative routes examined in this EIS.

The California Desert Protection Act of 1994 designated some of the WSAs identified in the CDCA as Wilderness areas. The WSA located to the west of the projects area was designated as the Jacumba Wilderness under the act.

3.7 TRANSPORTATION

Roads in the vicinity of the proposed and alternative transmission line routes are State Route 98, which runs east-west, crossing the routes, linking Calexico and Ocotillo, and State Route 30, which runs north-south between State Route 98 and Westmorland, parallel to the route for approximately 2 mi (3 km) (see Figure 1.1-1). Other roads in the area include Interstate 8, which runs from El Centro to San Diego to the west, County Highway 80, which parallels Interstate 8 between El Centro and Ocotillo to the west, and State Route 86, which links El Centro and Brawley to the north.

Table 3.7-1 shows average annual daily traffic flows over these road segments, together with congestion level designations (levels of service). The levels of service designations used in the table were developed by the Transportation Research Board (1985) and range from A to F. A through C represent good traffic operating conditions with some minor delays experienced by motorists; F represents jammed roadway conditions.

3.8 VISUAL RESOURCES

Assessment of the visual resources potentially affected by the transmission lines uses the BLM Visual Resource Management (VRM) System (BLM 1986a,b). These guidelines suggest a